



Annual Report

2020

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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

2020 was a challenging year for Tourism Lethbridge.

Much of the Board and staff efforts were spent on navigating the unanticipated challenges of the COVID pandemic. Understanding the complex and constantly evolving health orders and the implications for the tourism sector and our organization was a priority. Our focus was on responding to the evolving emergency to the best of our ability within our available resources.

Despite the challenges, there were accomplishments throughout the year. We were delighted to welcome a new CEO following the departure of our first Executive Director, William Slenders, in early 2020. After a robust search process, Jasmine Sangria joined our team in August 2020. Jasmine brought a fresh perspective and an abundance of enthusiasm to Tourism Lethbridge.

Tourism Lethbridge is still in its infancy requiring the board's continued work on foundational initiatives. The board, with support from Ms. Sangria, was delighted to be able to dedicate time for strategic planning in the fall of 2020. The results of this work is our Strategic Plan 2021–2025 which will guide our actions for the next four years.

We were also able to complete significant renovation work on the Visitor Centre, which will present a refreshed look when we are able to reopen to visitor travel, and we continued work to improve our organizational structure, policies and best practices.

As we enter into a new year, I must extend a sincere thanks to my fellow Board members for their support and dedication as we maneuvered the challenges of 2020. I would also like to thank our committed staff for their efforts throughout this extraordinary year. Finally, I must acknowledge the extreme challenges faced by our tourism partners and commend them for their perseverance and resiliency. Although there is still great uncertainty, Tourism Lethbridge is committed to continue to work to ensure the recovery and growth of the tourism sector in our community.



Suzanne Lint

Chair, Board of Directors



MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

Oki, Hello and Bonjour,

Having recently moved to Lethbridge for this opportunity, I am very excited to be here in this vibrant and diverse community.

To say that the last year has been unprecedented and challenging is an understatement. The tourism industry was the first sector to be hit by the pandemic, the hardest hit, and will be the last sector to recover. Alberta alone experienced a loss of \$1.566 billion in revenue from international tourism in 2020. The hotel industry suffered throughout 2020, with revenues falling an average of 79 percent across Canada. Passenger air transport revenues have declined by 91 percent across Canada and our city is no exception.

The positive news is that international travel restrictions have created pent up travel demand while allowing Canadians to stay home and build their savings. This provides an incredible domestic travel opportunity for Canadians to explore their own backyard and we will need to focus on getting them to travel to our region once it is safe to do so. Recovery is forecast to take years, but a significant increase in domestic travel can accelerate recovery. We need to change the mindset of travellers and remind Canadians to explore their own backyards. If Canadians shift two-thirds of their planned spend on international leisure travel towards domestic tourism, it will make up for the estimated \$19 billion shortfall currently facing Canada’s visitor economy, help

sustain 150,000 jobs and accelerate recovery. This recovery starts with our own local community and our mindsets towards regional travel.

As we try and navigate through this new normal, none of us know what the future may bring, and we can only anticipate what the tourism economy will be like a year from now. We need to be adaptable to change in order to restart the tourism economy.

In these trying times, it’s important to recognize that this is a time for leadership, not management. I would like to extend a deep appreciation to all our hardworking tourism partners, stakeholders, board and Tourism Lethbridge team for your significant contributions to the Industry’s restart efforts. Your collaboration and leadership will continue to be vital as we navigate through the end of the pandemic towards recovery.

Lethbridge is well positioned to become the hub to all the spokes in the region. Together, I believe we can brand Lethbridge as the gateway to Southwest Alberta, building a sustainable and prosperous tourism sector in this beautiful region of Alberta.



Sincerely,

Jasmine Sangria

CEO



ABOUT US

Vision

To be the tourism leader in Lethbridge, our unified destination tourism position energizes our future-showcasing our unique sense of spaces, its culture and the people.

Mission

Our actions and services resonate with stakeholders who have a keen interest in furthering Lethbridge; together Lethbridge leverages the collective resources to empower a higher lift and maximize performance, ultimately creating meaningful quality experiences for all our visitors.

Acknowledging Our Partners

We honour our community partners and the collaborative work that has strengthened relationships leading us on the path to tourism recovery. We have made enormous strides with a long list of partners, thanks to our shared belief that Lethbridge is at the crossroads of the road less travelled. We gratefully acknowledge the City of Lethbridge and Travel Alberta for the continued investment in our tourism community.



Professional and Community Partnerships

Tourism Lethbridge supports several national, provincial, and community initiatives and partner organizations. These include both charitable organizations as well as other not-for-profit societies.

These include:

- Lethbridge Sport Council
- Sport Tourism Canada
- Lethbridge Chamber of Commerce
- Indigenous Tourism Alberta
- Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada
- Tourism Industry Association of Alberta
- Tourism Industry Association of Canada
- Meeting Planners International

These organizations are integral to positioning Lethbridge as a destination. Tourism Lethbridge wants to promote our city as a sustainable tourism destination that encourages indigenous tourism, local agriculture and enhancements to our environment.



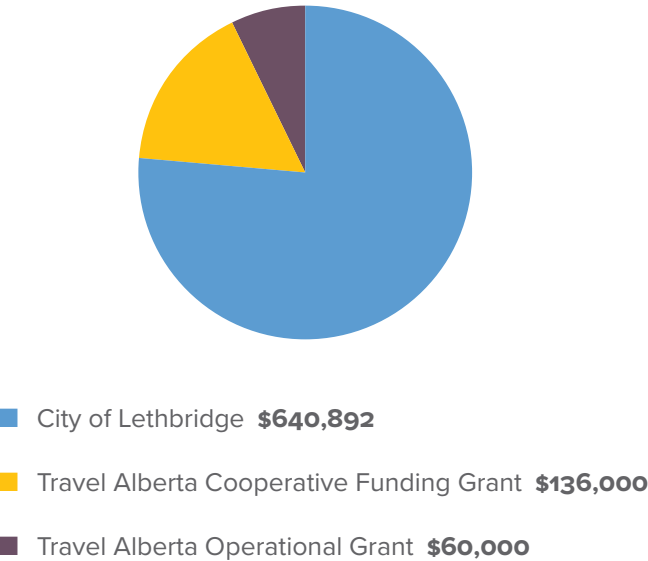
Funding Resources

We are financed primarily through by the City of Lethbridge and operate on a calendar fiscal year.

Through our co-investment strategy, we create partnerships with the public and private sectors to leverage our core appropriations and extend our marketing reach. As of January 2019, our base funding was stabilized at \$640,892 annually, making 2020 the first calendar year reflecting this new base funding level.

In 2020, we received \$196,000 of additional funding from Travel Alberta. This includes one-time funding of \$60,000 for COVID-19 Operational Relief which was allocated as part of the Government of Canada’s western economic diversification fund. In 2020, we also received \$136,000 in funding for marketing activities from Travel Alberta through their Cooperative Investment Program. Of this, \$94,000 was applied to 2020, with the remainder allocated for 2021 and to be used by March 31, 2021.

2020 Funding Sources



MANAGEMENT DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Business-to-Business Advocacy

By Fall of 2020, it was clear we needed to restart the tourism industry by supporting business solvency, championing safety, and maintaining our local tourism industry’s sustainability. Based on Travel Alberta’s *Alberta (re)Bound Strategy to RESPOND RESTART AND REBUILD*, we put together a key Phase II Plan to aid in these efforts.

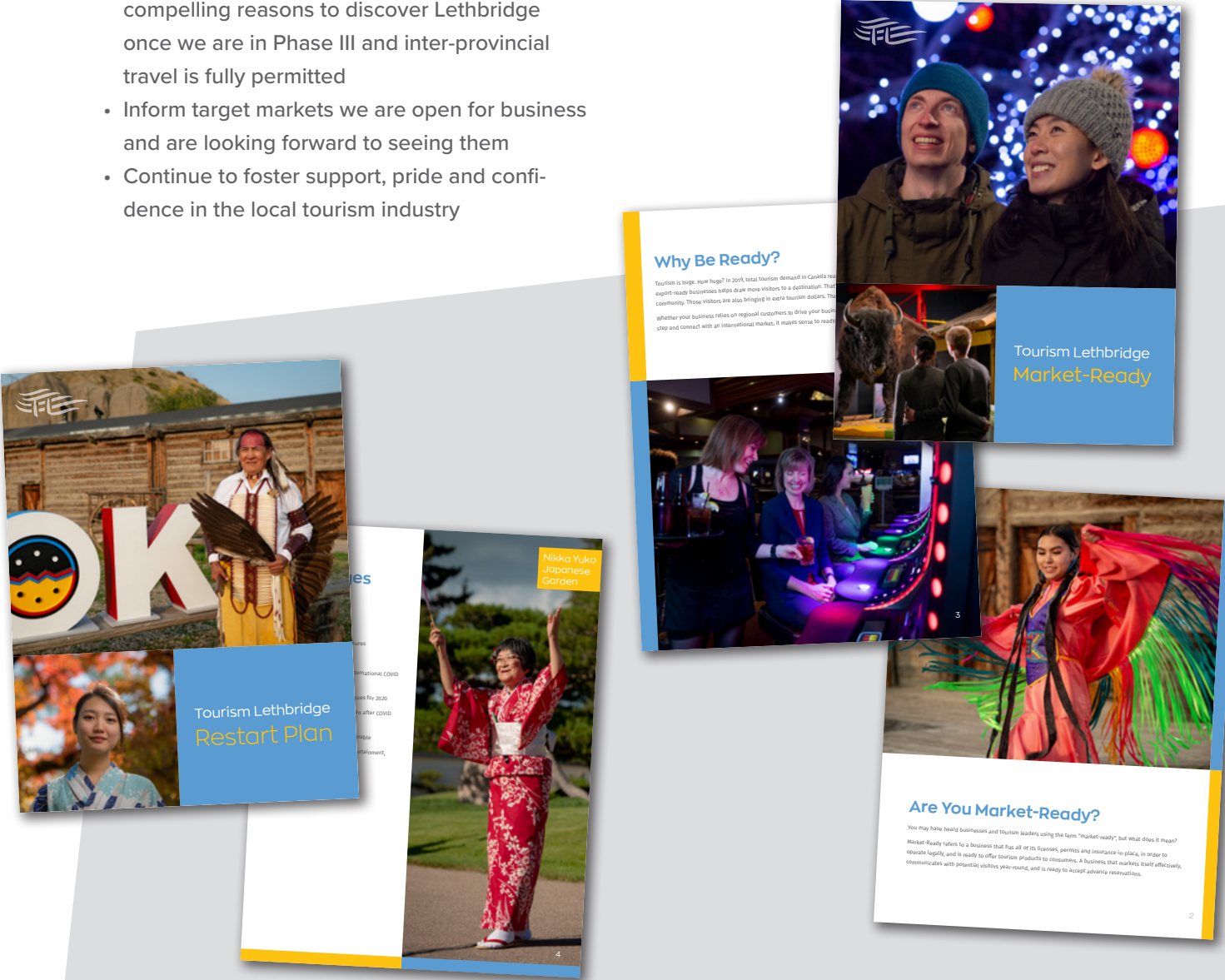
We have identified the following Phase II marketing objectives:

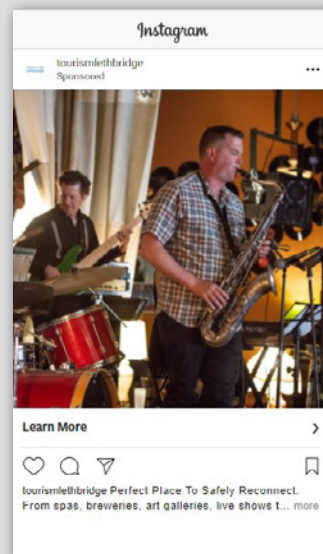
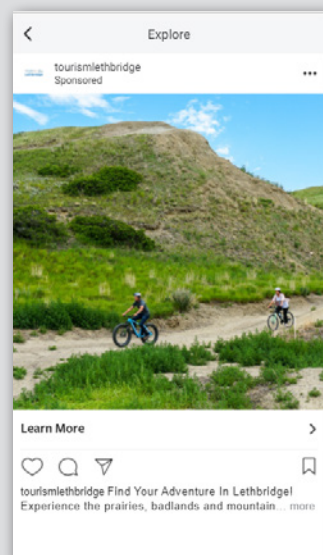
- Give Albertans compelling reasons to travel to Lethbridge
- Give Western and Central Canadian travellers compelling reasons to discover Lethbridge once we are in Phase III and inter-provincial travel is fully permitted
- Inform target markets we are open for business and are looking forward to seeing them
- Continue to foster support, pride and confidence in the local tourism industry

Trade Readiness

The strategic goal of our travel trade program focuses on long-term, sustainable growth for the destination. In the winter of 2020, we developed a document to aid in the review and development of trade readiness for tourism partners in our region. The development of more market-ready and export-ready experiences, while leveraging and expanding seasonal capacity and programming, strengthens conditions for Lethbridge to become a premier year-round destination.

This document/checklist is our first step in monitoring, supporting and cultivating the growth of Market-Ready and Export-Ready product.





Destination Marketing

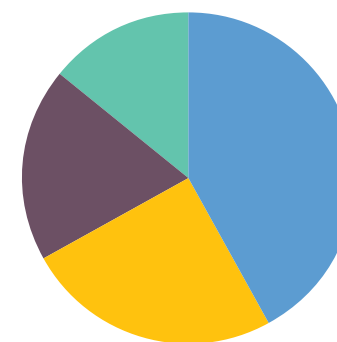
2020 was an unprecedented time for travel, both in Canada and the world. The arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic brought with it widespread business closures, travel restrictions, and an unimagined impact on the tourism sector. Therefore, adaptability was key. As borders closed and inter-provincial travel was discouraged, Tourism Lethbridge made the decision to adapt and focus on Alberta travellers and our hyper-local market. Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) make up a sizable portion of tourism traffic to Lethbridge. 2020 provided us with an opportunity to reach out to locals, remind them of opportunities in their city and help them prepare for a time when they could reunite with family and friends in Lethbridge.

Travel Alberta supported us with a Cooperative Marketing Grant. While the delivery of the grant arrived in July, we were able to create a robust summer marketing campaign utilizing multiple advertising media. The campaign included social media advertising, local television, local radio, provincial radio, direct mail distribution of printed materials, as well as publicity via travel writers and social media influencers.

The summer 2020 campaign was an attempt to make the best of the uncertain and constantly changing openings and closures related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The rules surrounding travel reduced our potential market dramatically, and the fluid nature of those rules led to the decision, in alignment with best practices suggested by Destination Canada and Travel Alberta, to focus on short-distance drives and a hyper-local market. In short, we focused on the markets of Edmonton, Calgary, and our VFR audience by targeting locals. With uncertainty surrounding openings and closures, the campaign was designed to raise awareness of the tourism opportunities in Lethbridge. Long-weekend getaways were the message to the markets in Calgary and Edmonton, while preparing for VFR was a goal with our local audience.

Our short-distance drive social media advertising generated 3,253,319 impressions. We looked to drive social media viewers to a campaign landing page on our website. To reach multiple target audience groups, the campaign ad segments aligned with specific interests and matching itineraries. These categories and itineraries were families, couples, outdoors, and culture. While Lethbridge is a family-friendly destination, it was the ads targeting couples which performed the strongest. 42% of the leads on Facebook were driven by the grown-ups. The Culture audience accounted for 25% of these leads, while the Family and Active groups drove 19% and 14% of the leads, respectively. Among the ads, the headline “Perfect Place to Safely Reconnect” resonated the most with the Grown-Ups.

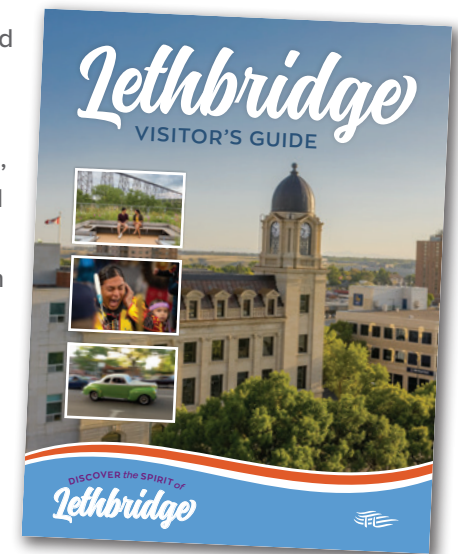
2020 Facebook Ad Leads



- Ads Targeting Grown-Ups / Couples **42%**
- Ads Promoting Culture **25%**
- Ads Promoting Family Fun **19%**
- Ads Promoting Outdoor Activities **14%**



Tourism Lethbridge produces creative content in house. In 2020, we completed two major print projects — a visitor guide and a visitor map (with a tear off version for our Visitor Information Centre and other local facilities). With the uncertainty around opening dates, we balanced the need for specifics in these guides with evergreen content that would remain relevant into 2021. As part of our direct mail tactic, we sent our visitor guides to 5,000 targeted homes in Calgary and Edmonton. We reached our local audience by advertising on television and radio and making available our visitor guide from our Visitor Information Centre (VIC) and at various locations around Lethbridge.



While our images were taken before social distancing and masking were required and commonplace, we avoided using crowd shots and instead featured photographs and video clips that aligned with current regulations. We were also able to film new material at Nikka Yuko Japanese Garden and Fort Whoop-Up to better promote their new *Summer Picnic Package*.



Social Media And Content Marketing

As retail stores shut down due to COVID-19 restrictions in March, we saw an opportunity to promote our unique local businesses. Our goal was two-fold: to inform locals about what is open in Lethbridge; to build bridges with our small business partners in town. A key travel market for Lethbridge is Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFRs), who we reach via our locals.

Promoting our #YQLocal shop local message, we aimed to educate and inspire locals about our city’s unique shopping opportunities. Post-campaign, locals would be better informed about opportunities in Lethbridge and able to share this knowledge with their VFRs. Of course, we also wanted to do our part to ensure the sustainability of local businesses post-COVID.

Facebook’s algorithm favours friend and group posts over business posts. The Lethbridge businesses we engaged in our #YQLocal video all shared or cross-promoted the video to their channels, where it was seen as trusted information by their friends and family. They, in turn, shared it again. In all, 387 unique channels shared our video for 181,000 impressions and 138,000 views. While our marketing spend on this was minimal, the post’s organic spread was stellar and we were able to genuinely connect with more people. Other successful organic social media posts included our video promoting the *Summer Picnic Packages* at Nikka Yuko Japanese Garden and Fort Whoop-Up. This video was seen by over 143,000 people.

Our video for New West Theatre’s *Live at the Drive-In* also performed spectacularly. New West Theatre has long been a summer entertainment anchor, and their drive-in performance at Exhibition Park was a creative way to adapt to COVID-19 restrictions. It was a successful partnership. Thanks to great community enthusiasm (758 likes, shares and other engagement), our video popped up on over 111,000 screens. Other notable social media success stories were the videos we created promoting disc golf in Lethbridge, an outdoor activity perfectly suited to the times, and our Art Days video, a reminder of the outsized importance art and culture have in our city.

2020 Social Media Stats

Audience growth on Facebook	56%
Average post engagement rate on Facebook	4.8%
Increase in total video views on Facebook	174%
Audience growth on Instagram	31%
Increase in impressions on YouTube	115%
Increase in views of YouTube	25%

2020 Website Stats

Increase of website users	67.31%
Increase in page views	89.25%
Increase in page views per session	22.58%



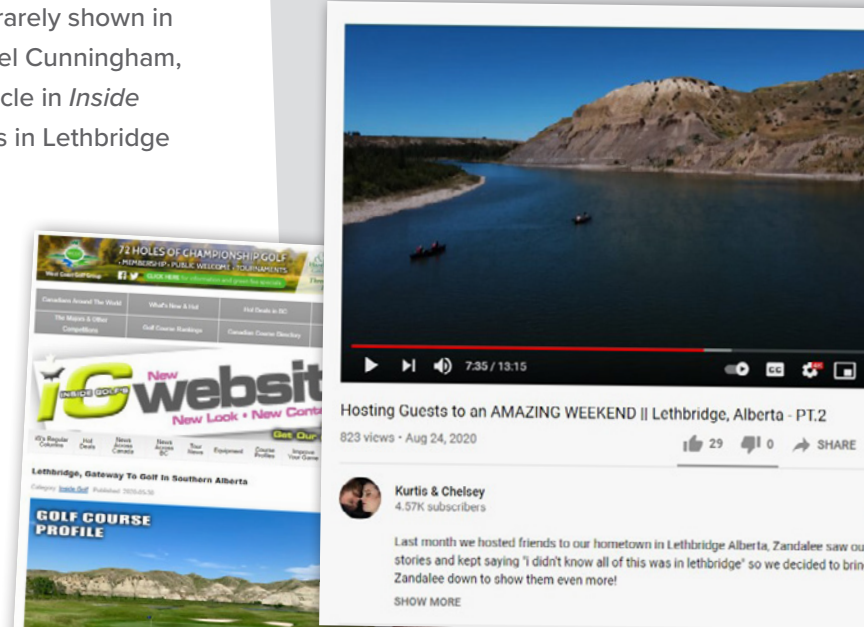
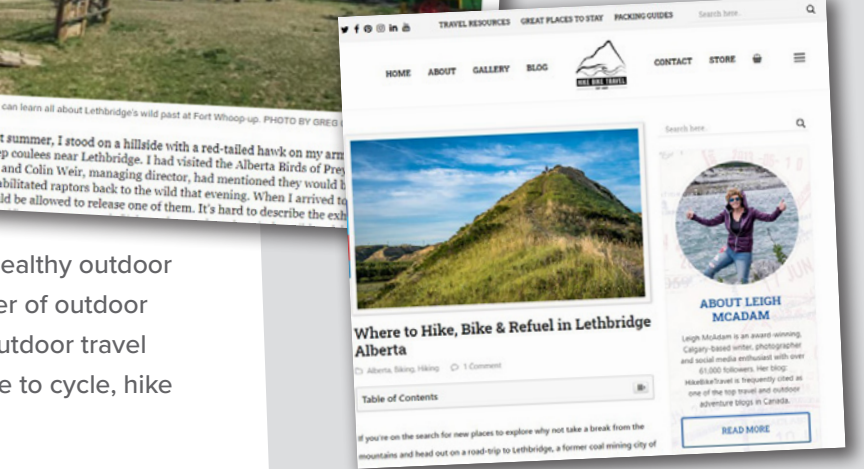
Media & Influencer Relations

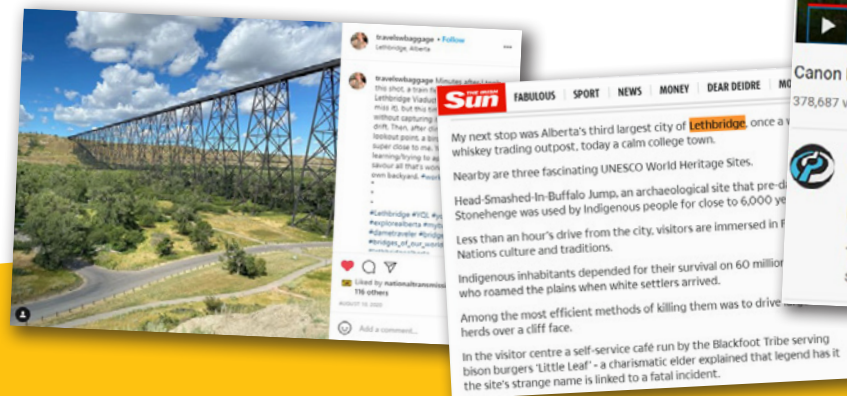
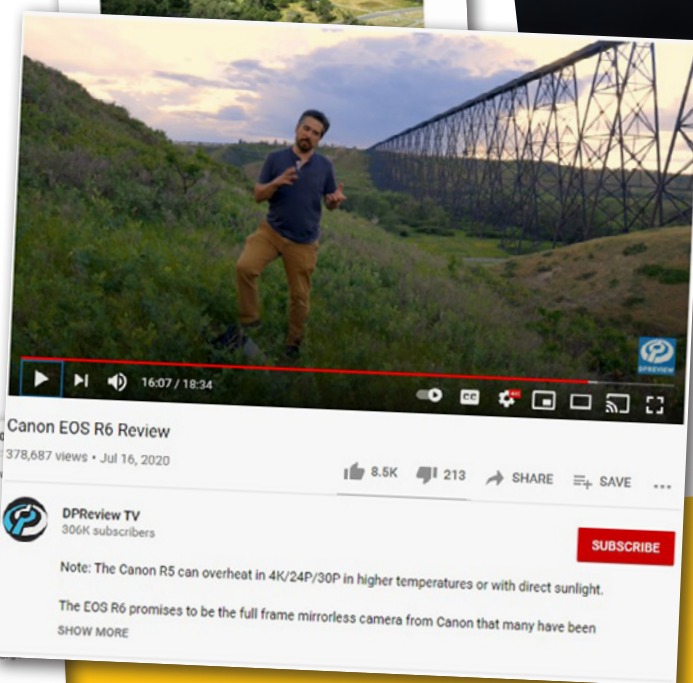
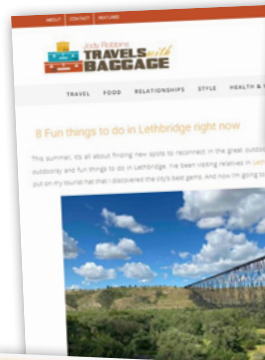
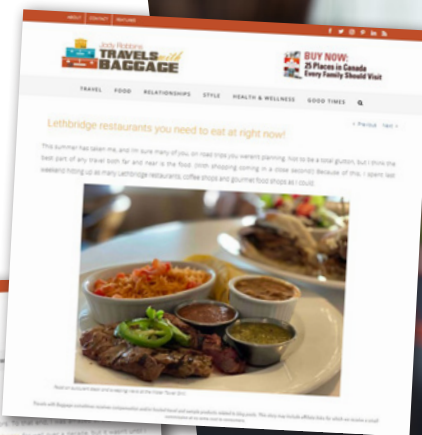
Despite the sudden challenges imposed by the COVID-19 lockdown in early March, Lethbridge still gained excellent media coverage in the province to encourage locals to rediscover their city and Albertans to explore Lethbridge as a travel destination. We wanted the coverage to be relevant, both during COVID and after, once the situation returns to normal. This is an important factor in our marketing as these articles, blogs and videos will remain relevant past 2020.

Major publication coverage was generated by Debbie Olsen’s “Lethbridge Area Offers Big Adventures with a Small-Town Feel” article in the Calgary Herald. It received 1,250,822 organic views.

The media tours we hosted were used to emphasize the safety of the destination and healthy outdoor activities available here. Lethbridge has a number of outdoor options, which we promoted heavily this year. Outdoor travel blogger Leigh McAdam was invited to Lethbridge to cycle, hike and explore our trails.

We also arranged for influencers *Kurtis and Chelsey* to canoe the Oldman River past impressive cliffs that are rarely shown in traditional promotional media. Golf writer, Michael Cunningham, delivered both a blog on his own site and an article in *Inside Golf* that shared the superb golfing opportunities in Lethbridge and area.





Jody Robbins, a renowned family blogger, did an excellent job of promoting the *Summer Picnic Package* and outdoor attractions on her blog, on Calgary television news appearances and in other print media. We received two gateway city broadcast spots with Jody Robbins as part of her recommended *Road Trips from Calgary* on Global News and CTV News Calgary.

Publicity in the summer of 2020 achieved a reach of 4,346,807 people. For a year with much uncertainty and travel restrictions, our publicity was an awareness success, on which we can build as travel restrictions lift.

Publicity in the summer of 2020 achieved a reach of

4,346,807
people!

GOVERNANCE AND STAFF

Board of Directors

Our Board of Directors consists of up to 13 members who oversee the management of the organization and provide strategic guidance and oversight.

The Board ensures that appropriate systems of governance, leadership and stewardship are in place while at the same time empowering management to deliver on its mandate.

Board membership comprises of the Chair, and three Executives. Further, up to nine additional directors, elected by the Board approval, make up the remainder of the Board. Directors are appointed based on the full range of skills, experience and competencies required to add value to our decisions on governance, strategic opportunities and risks.

At the end of 2019, there were five vacancies on the Board. In 2020, the Board welcomed three new members and saw the departure of four members, leaving six vacancies at the end of the year.

Over the course of the year, the Board met twelve times and average attendance at meetings was 85%.

Directors

As of December 31, 2020

- Suzanne Lint, Allied Arts Council
- Jeff Carlson, City of Lethbridge
- Greg Norman, High Level Law
- Ryan Parks, AGI
- Lane Anderson, London Road Media
- Michelle Day, Nikka Yuko Japanese Garden
- Katie Rabbit-Young Pine, Human Resources Professional





Committees of the Board

Executive Committee

The Executive Committee is comprised of four directors: a Chair, Vice Chair, Treasurer and Member At Large.

Policy and Bylaws Committee

The policy and bylaws committee is responsible for the development, updating and maintenance of the policy manual.

Nominating Committee

The nominating committee consists of three directors and is chaired by the Vice Chair. The Nominating Committee advises and assists in evaluating potential board candidates for appointment to the Board.

Audit Committee

In addition to the duties and functions mandated by the Financial Administration Act, the Audit Committee reviews and recommends to the Board processes for identifying and managing risk, internal control systems and processes for complying with related laws and regulations.

Advisory Committees

From time to time, Tourism Lethbridge creates advisory committees to advise it on how best to deliver our programs and services. The committees take their direction from management and report to the CEO, who in turn reports to the Board. Composed primarily of members from private sector tourism entities, these committees play an important role in linking our stakeholders to the tourism industry in Lethbridge and the region.

The following three advisory committees were in development at the end of 2020:

- Indigenous Tourism Advisory Committee
- Business Events (MICE) Advisory Committee
- Sports Tourism Advisory Committee

Meet Our Team



Jasmine Sangria,
Chief Executive Officer



Stephen Braund,
Marketing Director



Jackie Stambene,
Director of Visitor Services



Amelia Stevenson,
Executive Administrative
Assistant



Jarom Scott,
Visual Communications
Specialist



Emma Burnard,
Digital Content Specialist



Matthis Bruelheyde,
Travel Ambassador



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